

Mapping Connections Resource

Introduction

This resource was designed to guide practitioners in working with young people to identify the significant relationships in their lives. Through activities and guiding questions, young people have the opportunity to explore the supports and stresses that these connections provide, as well as their goals for those relationships. This resource focuses on prioritizing the needs of young people and supporting healthy family engagement.

Optional tools:

- Ecomap
- Circles of Support

Helping Young People Self-Identify Supports

Consider beginning with an Ecomapping or Circles of Support activity, which allow the young person to self-identify the relationships in their life. Using flip chart paper and markers, online illustrations, or other creative ways to map connections can also be effective. Regardless of the method, these questions can act as a guide for discussion and in creating goals for specific relationships.

Sample questions for discussion with the youth/young adult:

1. Who do you consider important in your life right now?
2. What does this relationship look like (level of support, dynamics, boundaries, etc.)?
3. Are there other people you regularly spend time with?
4. Do you have relationships in your life that you know really “work”?
5. Who in your life do you feel is supportive of your goals for the future?
6. If you really needed help, who could you count on for support (even if they couldn't fix the problem)?
7. If you were given an amazing job opportunity, who would you want to tell first?
8. Who would you consider your “family”?
9. In what ways do they provide support?

Understanding Goals & Supports Needed with Regard to Supports/Family

After the young person has identified key relationships, open a discussion to explore their goals for these relationships. This can also be done by reviewing their Ecomap or Circles of Support document. Begin the discussion with the most significant relationships, unless the young person prefers to discuss these in a different order.

Sample questions for discussion with the youth/young adult:

1. Offer scaling questions: Example - On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with your relationship with _____? (1 - being least satisfied, 5 - being most satisfied)
2. Are there any ways you would like to see this relationship change? In what ways?
3. Do you have any goals for this relationship?
4. In what ways can we support this relationship (and others that are important to you)?
 - This may include ways to support increased connectedness and/or setting healthy boundaries
5. How connected or involved would you like this person to be with our program?
 - Possible options could include: regular communication, invited to events or meetings, family therapy, called in an emergency, or not involved at all

Additional Considerations for Safe Family Engagement

When young people have relationships with family members that they identify as “stressed” or “tenuous/weak” (see eco-mapping symbols), additional support may help to reconnect, repair, or set boundaries in these relationships. Programs with goals of family reunification, family mediation, and/or family engagement should explore the stressors and challenges in these relationships to avoid putting a young person at further risk. It is important that this process is driven by the youth, who has the most experience in their family dynamic and can better predict a potential response of a family member.

Sample questions for discussion with the youth/young adult:

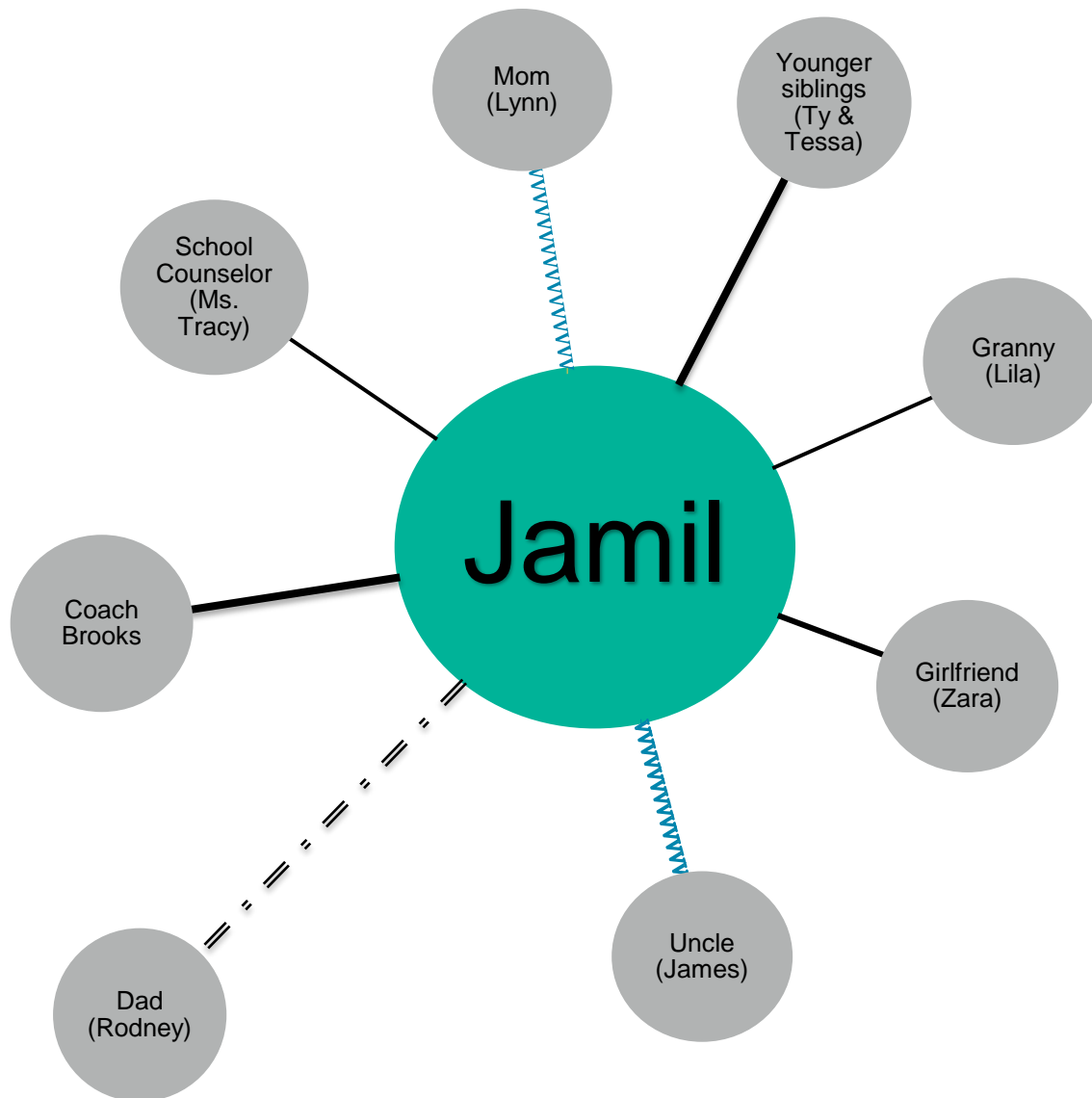
1. What types of contact are you comfortable with (i.e. in-person onsite, in-person home or community, phone, text, online)?
2. How often would you want to have contact (i.e. daily, weekly, monthly, holidays, anytime)?
3. Explore individual dynamics – Are there specific times that it is not good to be in contact or to have visits?
 - a. Examples include: “I don’t want to go to the house when my uncle is there” or “I only want to see my mom when she’s sober”?
4. How can we support you in having a healthy relationship with this person (if a relationship is the goal)?
 - a. Examples could include: check in after visits or calls, inviting them to group events, support for healthy boundaries, or help in a crisis

Question for legal guardian: Are there any court orders, custody agreements, child welfare investigations or other legal boundaries for contact with particular people?

Conclusion

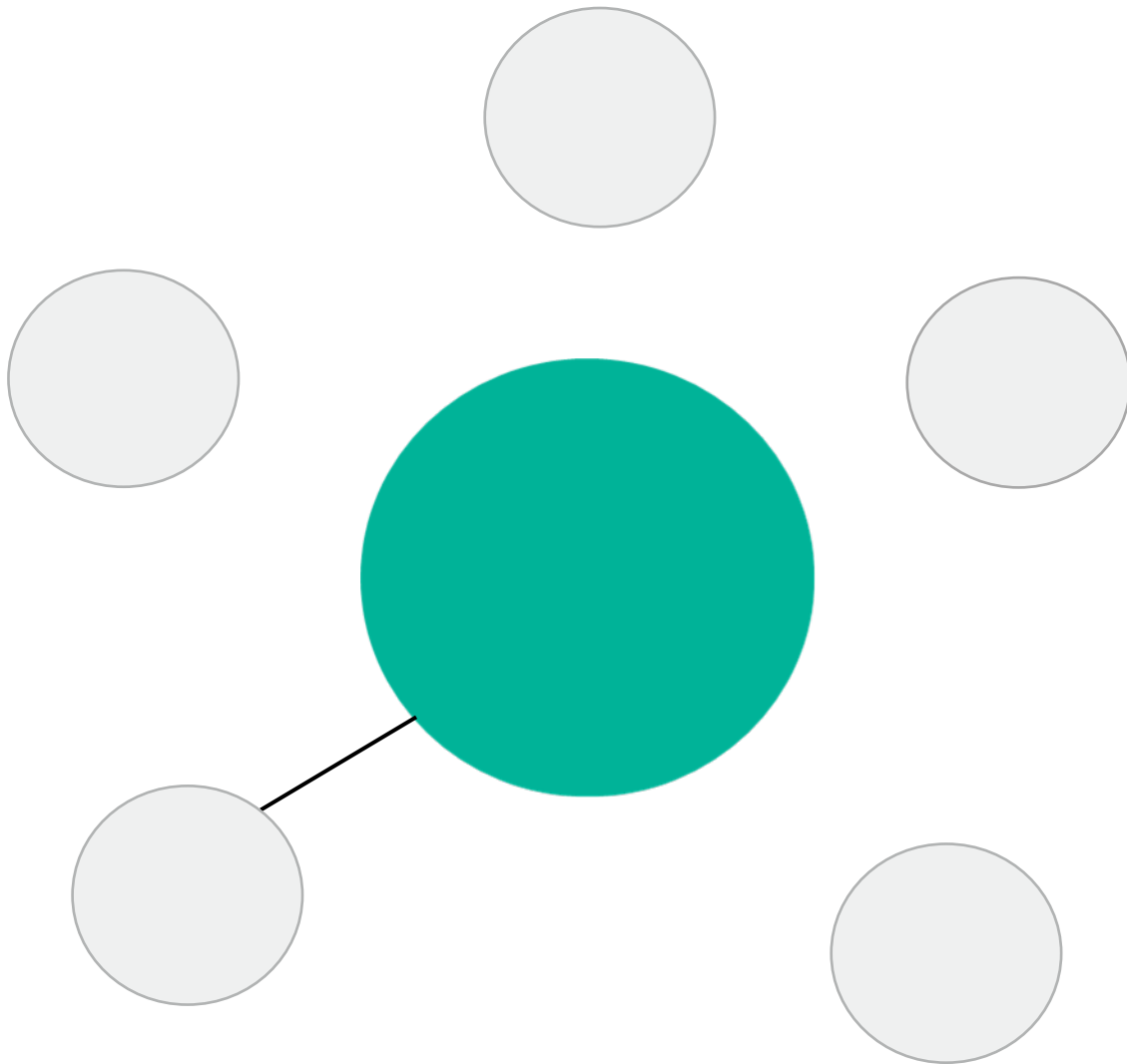
Family engagement is an important component of any program serving youth and young adults, as having these connections is shown to increase safety, stability, and positive outcomes. Who is engaged, and in what way should be guided by the young person, as they are the experts in their lives. Family engagement can look many ways, and agencies should explore the needs and preferences of youth in their program. All of us benefit from having supportive, long-term relationships in our lives. Programs can support young people by engaging those with whom they have an existing relationship, and by creating opportunities to broaden the circles of support in their lives.

Ecomap Example



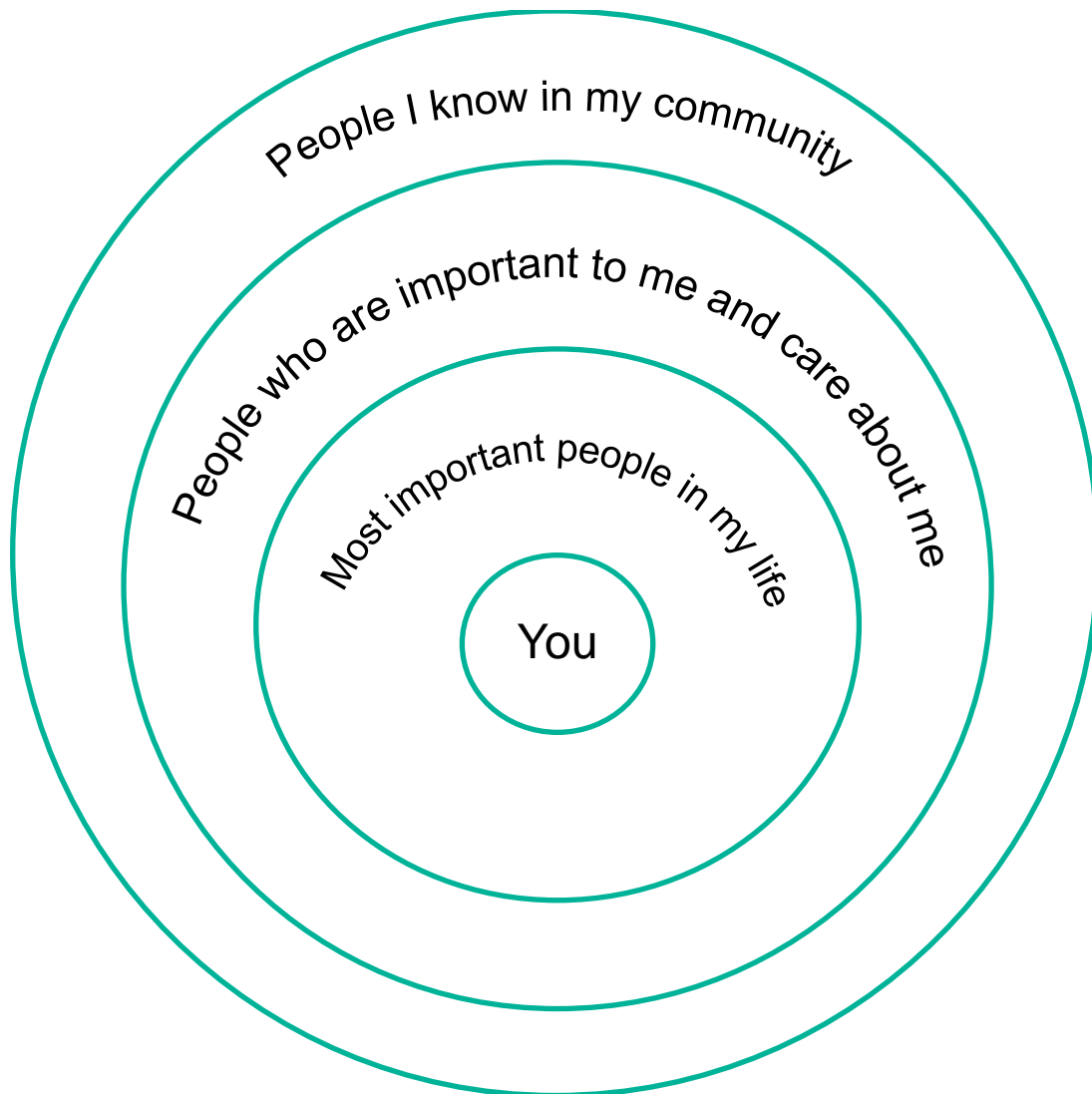
Key	
—————	Strong relationship
- - - - -	Tenuous/weak relationship
~~~~~	Stressed relationship

# Ecomap Template



Key	
—————	Strong relationship
- - - - -	Tenuous/weak relationship
vvvvvvvvv	Stressed relationship

# Circles of Support



## Instructions

You are the center of a growing world of connections and supports. Use this worksheet to think about people in your life that fit into these categories. These can include family members, friends, people you know from school, work, church, or other parts of your community. You decide. Fill in as many people as you can think of.

Now that you have filled out the people who you already have in your life, consider who else you would like to include in your circles. Add these names to the circle using a different color pen or by underlining them.

With the circles complete, think about how many people you know in each circle and celebrate those relationships! As you look at the people you would like to include in your circles, start thinking about how you can connect to them.